

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1047

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMCONSUL PARAMARIBO

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, GY

SUBJECT: ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL BEGINS HEARINGS WHILE SUGAR STRIKE
CONTINUES

REF: GEORGETOWN 0436

1. WHILE MOST OF GUYANA'S FIFTEEN THOUSAND SUGAR WORKERS REMAINED ON STRIKE, COURT OF APPEALS JUSTICE VICTORY CRANE HELD INAUGURAL SESSION OF ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL ON APRIL 4. GOVT HOPES THAT ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL WILL RESOLVE LABOR DISPUTE WHICH HAS PLAGUED SUGAR INDUSTRY SINCE BEGINNING OF MARCH. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT OF FIRST SESSION WAS ATTENDANCE OF RICHARD ISHMAEL, PRESIDENT OF MANPOWER CITIZENS ASSOCIATION (MPCA), RECOGNIZED UNION FOR FIELD AND FACTORY WORKERS. ALTHOUGH ISHMAEL HAD STATED PRIVATELY THAT HE WOULD COOPERATE WITH TRIBUNAL (REFTEL), FOR TACTICAL REASONS HE DELAYED MAKING DECISION PUBLIC UNTIL LAST MINUTE. ISHMAEL IS CONCERNED THAT MPCA, WHICH HAS NOT OFFICIALLY CALLED STRIKE, WILL BE OUTFLANKED BY UNRECOGNIZED GUYANA AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION (GAWU) IF IT APPEARS TOO ANXIOUS TO ACCEPT ARBITRATION. FIRST SESSION OF ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL ENDED WITH ADJOURNMENT UNTIL
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APRIL 14 WHILE MPCA PREPARES ITS CASE.

2. LATER, IN NATIONWIDE RADIO BROADCAST, ISHMAEL EXPLAINED HIS DECISION TO COOPERATE WITH TRIBUNAL. ISHMAEL ACCUSED CHEDDI JAGAN, HONORARY GAWU PRESIDENT, OF MISLEADING HIM ON COOPERATION BETWEEN MPCA AND GAWU AND SAID HE WOULD RESIST JAGAN'S URGINGS TO GIVE OFFICIAL MPCA SANCTION TO STRIKE. ISHMAEL ARGUED THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO COOPERATE WITH TRIBUNAL SINCE, UNDER NEW ARBITRATION LAW, THIS WAS ONLY TO ACHIEVE WORKERS DEMANDS. ISHMAEL ALSO WARNED THAT CONTINUED STRIKE COULD UNDERMINE INDUSTRY'S ABILITY TO PAY WAGE INCREASE. IN ANSWER TO ISHMAEL'S ARGUMENTS, CHEDDI JAGAN TOLD PRESS CONFERENCE APRIL 5 THAT GAWU HAD NO INTENTION OF APPEARING BEFORE TRIBUNAL.

3. COMMENT:IT WILL BE AT LEAST SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE IMPACT OF MPCA DECISION TO COOPERATE WITH ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL CAN BE SEEN. WHILE NO DRAMATIC RETURN TO WORK IS EXPECTED, ISHMAEL'S MOVE IS WELL TIMED AND COULD BRING MORE WORKERS GRADUALLY BACK TO WORK. BY REFUSING TO COOPERATE WITH TRIBUNAL, JAGAN LEAVES GAWU STRIKE WITHOUT ANY CLEAR OBJECTIVE AND RISKS CUTTING GAWU OFF FROM TAKING CREDIT FOR SETTLEMENT WHICH CRANE WILL AWARD TO WORKERS. KREBS

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